Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Meeting – Tuesday 15th May 2001

Papers circulated

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Education, Culture and Sport Committee

15th Meeting, 2001

Tuesday 15 May 2001

The Committee will meet at 2.30 pm in Committee Room 1.

1. **Items in Private:** The Committee will decide whether to take items 2 and 4 in private.

2. **Scottish Qualifications Authority:** The Committee will consider its lines of questioning for witnesses.

3. **Scottish Qualifications Authority:** The Committee will take evidence from—
   - Mr Bill Morton  (Chief Executive)
   - Ms Amanda Cornish  (General Manager)
   - Mr Billy MacIntyre  (Director of Awards)
   - Ms Jean Blair  (Project Manager)
   - Mr Don Giles  (Director, External Relations and Corporate Services)

4. **Research on Consulting Children:** The Committee will consider a draft report.

The following papers are attached for this meeting—

Submission from the SQA                  ED/01/15/1
Research on Consulting Children (Private papers) ED/01/15/2(P)

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ED/01/15/1

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE - 15 MAY 2001

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SQA)

Introduction

This paper provides an update on progress since our last meeting with Education, Culture and Sport Committee on 20 March 2001.

Staffing issues

SQA is currently planning staffing levels for over the summer with the objective of removing unnecessary workload and stress from staff. Outsourcing will be the preferred method, unless a job can only be carried out by redeployed staff. We will factor in time and resources to train outsourced staff. One decision which will have a positive effect on staff morale is the outsourcing of the candidates’ helpline to a specialised agency (see below).

As well as factoring in staff planning for the summer, SQA has put in place a training programme specifically for the Dalkeith site which includes team building activity, including role clarification, communication, objective and priority setting, and an on-going programme of basic training.

SQA has conducted a stress audit through an external agency and used the outcome to inform our stress management strategy. Staff and Management are invited to attend stress management workshops from 14 May, and we are also providing ad-hoc counselling facilities as required.

SQA's senior management team has recently been strengthened with the secondment of Brian Naylor (Director of Properties in Care, Historic Scotland) and Anton Colella (Depute Head at St Margaret Mary's School).

Communication

SQA has appointed a General Manager with overall responsibility for Customer Relations, Communication and Human Resources, and a dedicated Communications Manager is also now in post. Our communications strategy is being developed and will include:

- Internal briefing network (now operational). This network is made up of nominations from units and sections to ensure lateral dissemination of information
- Key stakeholder groups have nominated contacts/account managers within SQA
- A communication network for media information to key stakeholder groups via the Ministerial Review Group
- Regular internal communication of breaking news stories via e-mail network and the forum.
- The presence of Anton Colella, the school secondment to SMT will give SQA more of a school perspective. Likewise the forthcoming FE secondment.

Action Plan for Certification 2001

The Action Plan details all the things we must do to deliver Certification 2001, the extent to which we rely on the support of others and how progress on each of these can be measured.
The Plan includes for example, a number of decision checkpoints which allow Senior Management Team and the Board to make a formal review of progress in the run up to August. It also covers who is responsible for doing what and by when, plus an assessment of risk and the identification of contingency measures, should they be required.

Staff deployment and workloads will also be factored into the Plan, with special emphasis on the busy periods over the summer. As has been reported in the media, PricewaterhouseCoopers, SQA's internal auditors, are assisting us to track the Plan and verify its achievements.

**Data management**

We have replaced the former Operations Unit with a new Unit focusing explicitly on Data Management and Certification. This unit has been resourced with extra staff. We have secondments from the Scottish Executive to strengthen the data management function. For example, extra resource in testing, and the schools data management team.

As at 3 May 2001, 738,396 National Course entries had been received and processed for the 2001 diet (increase of 10% on previous year mainly at Intermediate levels). In addition, a further 5,226 entries had been received for the external assessment only with no associated course entry had been submitted. These cases are being investigated.

It is ultimately only the centres who can confirm the completeness and accuracy of the entry data which they have sent us and which we hold. In order for the centres to see the cumulative position and allow them to check the accuracy of the data, we have recently issued two reports:

- **cumulative entries report** which showed all entries received and processed by SQA up to 31 March 2001. Feedback from centres on these reports has been positive, many centres confirming that the information was accurate.
- **eligibility report** which showed candidates who were missing an entry for one or more units of a course for which they had been entered, or were missing an entry for the external assessment. The report identifies missing unit entries for the current diet but also looks back to check on unit results from previous years.

In addition, feedback from centres has been that the information on the forms to gather estimate and internal assessment marks/grades was, on the whole, accurate.

SQA believe that the entry data which we hold for National Qualifications in respect of Diet 2001 has a reasonably high level of completeness and accuracy, and that we have the mechanisms in place to allow centres to correct any deficiencies which remain.

**Marker recruitment**

As at 7 May, SQA has appointed 6105 of the markers which it needs for the main diet. We are looking to recruit 7620 markers. The National Exams Co-ordinator is working closely with SQA and the Directors of Education on marker recruitment.

It has been agreed that from 11 May, the National Exams Co-ordinator will ask Directors, Principals and Heads of Independent Schools to agree, if required, to release some of these markers from teaching duties to enable them to mark a second batch of scripts. SQA will continue to recruit markers using the conventional route and only if it proves necessary, will we call on some of these markers to mark a second batch of scripts.
Marking of all project assessments submitted in March and April is underway with a full complement of markers.

**Telephone helplines for August certification**

The candidate helpline will be outsourced and this work is being put out to tender. The outsourcing of this helpline will free up the SQA staff who have experience of working with schools and colleges. These staff will then be able to man the technical helplines to accommodate the calls from the schools and colleges.

**Appeals**

The planning process is underway. This year’s process is being reviewed in the light of last year’s experience and the findings of the Independent Appeals Review. The SQA Action Plan also has a Critical Success Factor specifically for Appeals. A Project Manager and small dedicated team will be assigned specifically to appeals and liaise with other staff responsible for carrying out the appeals process.

**Diet 2000 clear up**

We have a team dedicated to resolving outstanding cases from last year. As the questions have been resolved this team has been reduced to two or three people. 3000 certificates have been posted out in the last week, including successful appeals resolved to date from the Independent Appeals Review. Just over 200 cases remain to be resolved.

**Summary of results for Diet 2000**

A final summary of results is scheduled to be issued in mid-May 2001. The report will contain information on all candidates who completed National Courses in the summer 2000 diet. The report will include:

- candidates who completed Standard Grade, SCE Higher Grade, CSYS and all levels of the new National Qualifications but whose results required further investigation
- the outcome of appeals including the Scottish Executive’s review cases

The centre SOR will be paper-based and list results by course i.e. subject and level. Due to other work priorities there will be no electronic version of the report.

Explanatory notes and guidance will be issued with the report.

**Schools Account Management Team**

Since October 2000, 1007 schools have been visited and 100 education authorities. The team gathers information on concerns raised during visits and has made suggestions for improvements, such as reviewing the overall timetable of what we send out to schools, when and what the deadlines are for returning information. It is acknowledge that a guide for schools would be helpful.

**Certification for Further Education (College Data Reconciliation Exercise)**

At 11 May 2001, the data match was reaching conclusion with 42 colleges having been through the matching exercise. For the 18 FEMIS centres a final iteration process was required.
The number of certificates issued from 1 January 2000 to 29 March 2001 for all group awards (SVQs and Higher National Qualifications) was 29,747. There will be run of Unit certification to be despatched 16, 17 and 18 May, which includes candidates from the FE sector, and in the main, will pick up candidates who have unit results on their records.

**Duplicate registrations**

SQA’s database contains duplicate candidate registration details which require to be merged. Improvements are being phased in between now and October 2001. The first step is to introduce the Scottish Candidate number (SCN) merge facility. The software is under development and is scheduled to go live on 25 May 2001. Candidate cases are being prioritised e.g. urgent cases, where merge is needed for certification of a group award, will be merged first. These cases have a target completion date of 15 June 2001.

**Longer term plans**

We are aware that concentrating solely on Certification 2001 could have an adverse effect on 2002 and beyond.

We have therefore set up a number of groups to look at our business both in strategic and operational terms:

- The Action Plan Steering Group will continue to manage and monitor the planning process around Certification 2001.
- A Business Recovery Planning Group will look at SQA’s future needs and a number of working groups have been set up to address the different issues:
  - Qualifications and Customers
  - Internal Processes
  - Commercial Activity
  - Certification 2002
- A Logistics Group will provide a decision making forum for day-to-day requirements - such as staffing, services, accommodation, communications, etc. It will assist the work of SMT and the other planning groups.
- A Transitional Group, chaired by Bill Morton, will look at how we are going to manage change and restructuring over the next three years.